

# Public Attitudes to Bushfire Fundraising

Insights from national opinion poll 16-18 January 2020

In partnership with



The Professional Body for Australian Fundraising





#### Foreword

The 2019/2020 bushfire season on the east coast of Australia has been devastating for scores of communities and hundreds of thousands of people as well as serious impact on the Australian landscape and environment.

During crises like these, Australians prove time and again their incredible generosity, going deep in their pockets to give. As a result, by the middle of January 2020, with fires still raging and the season far from over, Australian charities and causes had already raised close to half a billion dollars in donations.

From previous studies after disasters like the 2004 Southeast Asia Tsunami, the 2011 Queensland Floods and the 2009 Victoria Bushfires, we know that people continued to give to their favourite causes while donating to the disaster relief effort at hand. Those studies suggest that rather than replacing their regular donations, Australians tend to give for a compelling and urgent need, in addition to their regular giving.

As the representative body for the \$9.9 billion fundraising sector in Australia, Fundraising Institute Australia was keen to understand more fully the impact that such incredible generosity has on ongoing fundraising by Australian charities. Would it negatively impact the day-to-day fundraising efforts of FIA charity members? What steps could we take to ensure that our regular giving programs are preserved, given that beyond these kinds of emergencies, the causes and needs which require Australian generosity continue to exist?

Partnering with More Strategic, Australia's leading fundraising, research and experience management consultancy, research was conducted to provide clarity for Australian charities on the impact of the bushfire emergency relief and guidance on the way forward with their regular fundraising activity now and into the future.

Katherine Raskob Chief Executive Officer Fundraising Institue Australia



### **Fast Facts**

- 53% of Australians donated to a Bushfire Appeal
- 43% donated indirectly, through a collection organised on behalf of a charity
- 14% donated through Facebook, the majority for the first time and they expect to give this way again

The Rural Fire Service was the most mentioned appeal followed by the Red Cross Disaster Relief and Recovery.

- 37% were new donors to the organisation they donated to
- 36% were unsure how the funds donated would be used
- 86% are confident the organisation they supported will use donations wisely
- 88% expect donations to be used within the next few months

Donors were evenly split between supporting communities impacted, volunteer firefighters, those who have lost homes and to rescue animals

- 36% trust the charity to do their best to minimise administration costs but 29% expect 100% of their donation to be used for the cause.
- 64% have not heard anything from the charity they donated to.
- \$50 median gift and \$121 average gift (across multiple appeals)
- 59% gave more than they would normally give
- 18% expect to increase their giving to other causes and 12% to reduce gifts. Higher value donors are more likely to say they will increase
- 95% were positive or neutral to "charities in unrelated areas still need to actively fundraise" with 43% somewhat agreeing and a remarkable 25% strongly agreeing.



## **Implications**

#### For fundraising organisations – respectfully continue

#### Keep Calm and Carry on Fundraising

The majority of donors expect to continue giving the same amount to the causes they care about. More donors say they will give more in the future than say they will give less, despite their generosity towards the bushfire appeals.

Nearly all donors believe that charities in unrelated areas still need to be actively fundraising.

#### Facebook is the new normal

Over 1.3 million people donated to the extraordinary appeal by Celeste Barber on behalf of the Rural Fire Service. Our research suggests that for nearly 66% of donors, this was the first time they had ever given through Facebook. 85% of them are likely to give in this way again.

#### Form partnerships

43% of donors donated via a third party, not directly to the charity. These partnerships with celebrities, banks, supermarkets and the like, were a very effective way to capture new donors. In some cases, the partner was more important than the charity, with 30% of donors unsure which charity they were supporting. 80% of donors acknowledged that their decision of whom to support was influenced by the media, friends and social media. Charities must always remember; it is not about them, but the difference they make.

#### Embrace younger donors

The highest rate of giving to the bushfire appeal, at 64% of respondents, was amongst the 35-44-year-old's, with 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 next highest. This is a different audience to the traditional charity donor profile. 35-44-year-old's also had the highest average donation to fire appeals.

#### Be omnipotent

The most popular way to give to the fire appeals was online and direct to the charity (though this may underrepresent the Facebook appeal which some may interpret as direct or indirect). However, one in four people gave to the appeals using multiple fundraising channels and they had a higher average overall donation at \$116. A similar proportion gave to multiple appeals and, again, they had a much higher average gift.

#### Look long term

Trust in charities in Australia is high. 81% of people say charities make a real difference and 61% agree that charities are ethical and honest. But trust is a fragile thing. How the charity sector manages this crisis will influence the views on charities for years to come. Scientific research shows that giving makes people feel good – and 61% of the public agreed. The fundraising sector must do all it can to respect donors and protect public trust.



#### Stay focussed and authentic.

Beware of finding a tangential link to the bushfires to boost your fundraising. There are already signs that people are feeling overwhelmed by the number of appeals. 48% of people agree that there are too many bushfire appeals now. 66% believe some organisations are jumping on the bushfire bandwagon; these aren't necessarily charities, but this response suggests a degree of cynicism towards those who inauthentically align themselves to the Bushfire Crisis.

#### Get together

58% of the public think there should be a single entity to collect donations on behalf of all charities. People want to help. Make it as easy as possible. The public is perhaps less concerned about state borders than some charities are, with 18% of Victorian donors giving to the Rural Fire Service even though it doesn't operate in their state.

#### For donors – have realistic expectations

#### The time trade-off

88% of donors expect the donations to be utilised within the next few months. This presents a massive challenge to organisations who are not used to dispersing such huge amounts. Whilst there is a pressing urgency to meet the immediate needs of those most severely impacted by the fires, there is a trade-off between acting quickly, acting fairly and maximising impact. Accept that longer-term solutions may have a greater impact.

#### It costs money to manage money

Encouragingly, 36% of donors trust the charity they supported to do their best to minimise administration costs. However, another 29% believe every dollar should go to the purpose it was donated to. Given that organisations have minimal fundraising costs for this type of emergency, it makes sense that the amount that "gets there" is higher. However, wise organisations will still need to efficiently manage distributions and monitor the long-term impacts of the programs they run.

#### For Fire Fundraising organisations – be accountable

#### Be transparent

Most people were inspired to give by the sheer enormity of the fires and the distressing stories on the news every night. How the funds were used was probably a secondary concern at the time of giving – people just wanted to help. Now though, they want to know if they made a wise decision trusting you with their money. 65% of donors say they have a clear or pretty good idea of how funds will be used. But 24% are not sure – and want to know! Explain what you have done with donations and what you will do – to maximise the difference every \$ makes. Explain why you need administration. Explain why there is a longer-term gain if using donations over a longer period.



#### Connect with your donors

88% of donors said they would give to the charity they supported again. Bearing in mind that nearly one in three donors had not given to the fire fundraising charity before (and this was over half of donors for the RFS), this creates an opportunity to build a strong and enduring relationship which will equip charities to manage future fire risk and impacts. However, only 23% of donors could recall receiving any communication from the charity – not even a thank you!

#### Listen to your donors

Right now, donors have an exceptionally high level of trust, with 86% confident their funds will be used wisely. But 40% want to know how donations have been and will be used. There is likely to be a difference of opinion on how funds are to be used between donors who want an immediate impact on a short-term problem compared to the charities who want to create longer-term more sustainable solutions. Only by listening to donors will you know if there is a gap between their expectations and your intentions. Charities cannot be donor led. After all, the charities are on the frontline, have the experience and the expertise, however they cannot keep donors in the dark.

#### For Australia

#### Be proud

The bushfire crisis brought out the best in us. 81% of the public agreed with the statement that 'the way everyday Australians respond to a crisis makes me proud'. In the months ahead, there will be questions about how funds were used, was it fast enough, was it effective. For now, let's remember how spontaneously generous Australians are.

#### A climate watershed?

52% of the public say they take climate change more seriously now as a result of the bushfires. Their beliefs varied based on voting intention, with 72% of Greens voters, 61% of Labour and 41% of Liberal voters agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was also reflected in how important climate change is when determining how to vote, with 36% of Greens intenders saying it completely guides their decision, compared to 15% of Labour and 11% of Liberal intenders. Conversely, it is not a factor at all for 28% of Liberal intenders, 15% of Labour and 4% of Greens voters.



# **About the Study**

A representative sample of Australians completed an online survey between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Participants were sourced through Qualtrics XM. Qualtrics removed any spurious responses (straight-line answers, unlikely gift amounts etc.). More Strategic created the questions, programmed the survey and conducted the survey using Qualtrics Experience Management software.

## **More Strategic**

More Strategic is Australia's leading fundraising, research and experience management consultancy specialising in insight-driven strategies for not-for-profits.

More Strategic has conducted research on behalf of many of Australia's largest and most respected charities. We have a particular passion for collaborative research that is beneficial to the whole charity sector.



## The Author



Martin Paul is one of Australia's most experienced and respected fundraisers. He has a passion for evidence based decision making in the not for profit sector and always wants to understand *why people do what they do*. With a background in economics and marketing Martin led fundraising teams at WWF, The Heart Foundation and Cancer Council before co-founding More Strategic in 2008. Martin is a popular presenter at fundraising conferences in Australia, Europe and Asia.

# www.morestrategic.com.au

Please get in touch with More Strategic if you would like to understand charity specific insights or research your supporter base in the context of Bushfire Appeal Fundraising.







The Professional Body for Australian Fundraising

FIA is the largest representative body for the \$9.9 billion fundraising sector. FIA members include charities and other fundraising not-for-profits operating domestically and internationally as well as the organisations and professionals that provide services to them. FIA advocates for the interests of the sector, administers a self-regulatory Code, educates fundraising practitioners, promotes research, and creates forums for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. For more information visit <a href="https://www.fia.org.au">www.fia.org.au</a>





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